

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L HELSINKI 001146

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/27/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [EALD](#) [BO](#) [FI](#) [PROG](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: FINLAND SUPPORTIVE OF COORDINATED U.S-EU EFFORTS
IN BELARUS

REF: STATE 188900

Classified By: PolChief Gregory Thome, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: The GOF welcomes U.S. efforts to coordinate a robust Belarus strategy with EU partners. It views a strong message to Lukashenko as desirable and welcomes democracy promotion and outreach to civil society. However, the GOF cautions that the U.S. and EU must commit for the long-term because, over the near term, Lukashenko is likely to stay in power and already-beleaguered opposition groups and civil society may face violence in the run-up to next year's election. Finland understands it must take on a leadership role regarding Belarus, given the fact that elections will take place there during Finland's EU presidency. End Summary.

12. (C) PolChief delivered reftel points to Tuula Yrjola, Counselor in the Finnish MFA's Unit for Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. Yrjola welcomed U.S. efforts to initiate a robust Belarus strategy in coordination with EU partners, calling coordination the best chance for promoting change in a very difficult country. Yrjola agreed on the importance of a tough message delivered directly to Lukashenko. She expressed pessimism that he would be moved by a demand that he not run in the upcoming election; however, she agreed that our statements to him should emphasize that last year's referendum was "illegal;" that we are deeply disturbed by the deteriorating human rights situation and by Lukashenko's crackdown on the opposition; and that we are "not going away" on these issues and are prepared to maintain pressure on him as long as abuses continue and reform is ignored.

13. (C) Yrjola did express some concern regarding the uniformity of the overall U.S.-EU joint policy of high-level contacts with the GOB. Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, for example, have immediate needs to discuss pressing issues such as the environment and border security with the GOB, and they often cannot secure cooperation unless these are addressed on a ministerial level. For its part, the GOF is willing to be flexible regarding these member states' bilateral contacts, but will continue to staunchly support the overall EU policy proscribing high level contact. The GOF, Yrjola added, also believes that the EU should bolster its no-contact policy by toughening visa sanctions and travel restrictions against members of the Lukashenko government, especially if it engages in any form of anti-opposition violence.

14. (C) Yrjola also welcomed efforts to build democracy and reach out to the opposition and civil society. She highlighted our joint radio outreach as a very positive step, adding that she hoped Poland would soon add programming of its own to complement the Deutsch Welle broadcasts. Finland is also preparing to make a bilateral donation of Euros 100,000 to the European Humanities University currently "in exile" in Lithuania until a larger EU grant through the Nordic Council kicks in during January, Yrjola noted. However, she cautioned that direct outreach to NGOs and political parties inside Belarus would remain problematic. Neither is strong, Yrjola said, and both face the grim prospect of Lukashenko's using violence to crush them as the elections approach. She was also not enthusiastic about some EU members' willingness to "hand bagfuls of money" to the opposition or civil society, noting that it was often difficult to determine exactly who was running what NGOs and in whose hands the funds were actually ending up. (Yrjola opined that the soon-to-be-opened EU aid office in Minsk will go a long way toward ensuring that no assistance ends up in the hands of "former KGB officers masquerading as heads of NGOs.")

15. (C) Comment: The Finns understand that, with Belarussian elections scheduled to take place during their EU presidency, they must take a leadership role. They have no illusions about the difficulties we face on Belarus, but are clearly willing to adopt long-term strategies and stick with them. End Comment.

HYATT